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PROGRAMME PLANNING

Programme 1, Political affairs, of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

Letter dated 25 October 1996 from the Chairman of the First Committee to the President of the General Assembly

With reference to your letter dated 26 September 1996 concerning programme 1 of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, as set out in document A/51/6 (Prog. 1), I would like to inform you that the First Committee of the General Assembly convened a special meeting on 21 October 1996 in order to provide an opportunity for delegations to express their views on that subject.

I have the pleasure to submit for the consideration of the Fifth Committee the texts of written comments prepared by the representatives of Brazil, Cuba, Indonesia (on behalf of the States Members that are members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries), Ireland (on behalf of the States Members that are members of the European Union), Oman, Mexico, South Africa and the United States of America.

(Signed) Alyaksandr SYCHOU
Chairman
First Committee of the General Assembly

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Annex

VIEWS OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMME 1, POLITICAL AFFAIRS, OF THE PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Brazil

[Original: English]

[21 October 1996]

1. The delegation of Brazil considers that a structured, in-depth well-prepared discussion of the activities of the United Nations in the area of disarmament should be an integral part of the work of the First Committee. This is in line with our position that the Main Committees of the General Assembly should focus their work on issues of greater practicality and importance.

2. In order to comment on the proposed medium-term plan, it is necessary to recall some of the main factors affecting the political work of the United Nations in the last five years. This has been a period of deep changes in the international system, during which old concepts and ideas have lost relevance and a new way of thinking has become necessary.

3. We thank the Secretary-General for taking the lead in proposing a new conceptual framework for the United Nations, notably in the reports entitled "An Agenda for Peace" (A/47/277-S/24111), "New dimensions of arms regulation and disarmament in the post-cold-war era" (A/C.1/47/7) and "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" (A/50/60-S/1995/1.

4. However, some conceptual confusion persists, which is only natural, given the wide range of the changes in the international system. The General Assembly has addressed this question to a considerable extent, and has contributed to clarification in some areas, notably in resolutions 47/120 A of 18 December 1992 and 47/120 B of 20 September 1993 on An Agenda for Peace. We encourage reference to these resolutions in future redrafting of the medium-term plan.

5. We would like now to refer specifically to three areas that have a direct impact on the medium-term plan.

6. The first conceptual problem is one that has already been clarified by the Secretary-General himself. It is the confusion between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. It is not necessary to dwell on the tragic events that showed the need to make a clear distinction between these two activities. In paragraph 36 of the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General states - and we thoroughly agree - that peacekeeping and the use of force (other than in self-defence) should be seen as alternative techniques and not as adjacent points on a continuum, permitting easy transition from one to the other.

7. The second area where there is need for clarification is the distinction between preventive diplomacy and preventive deployment. Preventive diplomacy is diplomacy; preventive deployment is peacekeeping. We should not mistake one for the other. It is necessary to avoid bundling together all sorts of activities, in areas such as traditional diplomacy, peacekeeping, peace enforcement,

development cooperation, electoral assistance, etc., under the vague idea of "preventive action". One consequence of such lack of clarity is an over-ambitious approach in a time of financial and political constraint for the United Nations.

8. The third area in need of clarification is the distinction between post-conflict peace-building and development activities in general. The range of activities that may be necessary and appropriate, in the case of assistance to societies that have been torn apart by conflict, has a much broader scope, and is often qualitatively different, than regular development assistance. Lack of clarity in this case may lead to excessive ambition on the part of the United Nations and failed expectations on the part of States, as well as further conceptual confusion, as in the abuse of the term "preventive peace-building". We therefore request that the expression "post-conflict" be added whenever "peace-building" appears in programme 1.

9. Turning now to subprogramme 1.3, Disarmament, we note that paragraph 1.13 gives an erroneous impression of recent developments in the disarmament area. Its basic message is that all goes well in the nuclear area; however, "problems related to conventional weapons ... continue to pose a threat to international security". This assertion contradicts directly the following documents:

(a) The report of the Secretary-General entitled "New dimensions of arms regulation and disarmament in the post-cold-war era" (A/C.1/47/7), inter alia, in paragraphs 9, 21, 24 and 27 (which could be used to amend paragraph 1.13);

(b) The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" (A/50/60-S/1995/1), paragraphs 57 and 60, in which it is stated that "disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation, with special reference to weapons of mass destruction" are of "paramount importance";

(c) The answer of the Security Council to the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace (S/PRST/1995/9), in which it is stated, inter alia, that "the Security Council shares the Secretary-General's assessment of the paramount importance of preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction";

(d) At the fiftieth session of the General Assembly only, resolutions 50/65, 50/66, 50/70 A, C, I, N, P, R and 50/71 E, all of 12 December 1995;

(e) The latest report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/51/1), inter alia, in paragraphs 1079 and 1080.

10. In paragraph 1.15 of the programme, the reason for the priority given to "post-disarmament problems" is not clear. The implication is that disarmament issues are no longer a priority. It is also difficult to see the reason why "particular attention will be paid" to the maintenance of "regional variants" of the Register of Conventional Arms, since (a) such variants do not exist, (b) if they existed they should be maintained primarily by regional arrangements and (c) any eventual support from the United Nations would have to be mandated first by the General Assembly.

11. Paragraph 1.16 places an excessive emphasis on the role of the United Nations in regional disarmament. It must be said that regional disarmament is a good thing, but this is an area in which the role of the United Nations is

necessarily secondary compared with the role of regional mechanisms. This language could be replaced by paragraph 15 of the "New dimensions" report (A/C.1/47/7), which establishes an adequate balance between global, regional and subregional efforts.

12. In paragraphs 1.17 and 1.18, specific mention should be made to the continuity of the publication of the United Nations Disarmament Yearbook and to the maintenance of the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme, which enjoy universal support and are of particular importance for developing States.

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]

1. My delegation wishes, first of all, to express its full support for the statement to be delivered by the delegation of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, with which we fully agree.

2. The delegation of Cuba welcomes the fact that our Committee is taking some time from its tight schedule to consider a topic that we believe to be of vital importance.

3. On previous occasions, and despite complaints by some delegations, our Committee has not considered the proposed medium-term plan and the corresponding programme on disarmament. Our role has been confined to transmitting the views of some delegations to the body responsible for considering and adopting the proposed medium-term plan.

4. We are confident that every delegation here is aware of the extreme importance of what we are called on to consider, for it is - no more and no less - the programmatic basis of the course that the Organization will follow during the period 1998-2001 in the field of disarmament.

5. The many efforts and useful initiatives that we have been considering in our Committee will not produce results if they are adopted merely as resolutions and the concepts they embody are not subsequently incorporated into the Organization's programme and do not receive sufficient support when the budget comes under discussion.

6. That is why the consideration and analysis of the various programmes by the relevant intergovernmental bodies is an essential exercise. We note with great concern that some delegations are opposed to this exercise, maintaining that such analysis is not the province of our Committee but rather of the Fifth Committee.

7. In this connection, my delegation wishes to point out that the Regulations Governing Programme Planning provide for the consideration of the proposed medium-term plan by the relevant intergovernmental bodies, taking into account their knowledge and experience in these areas, in addition to their overall view of what the priorities should be in each particular area; in our case, it is the area of disarmament.

8. Therefore, today we are merely complying with established practice. My delegation regrets that the First Committee has not been properly advised with regard to its responsibility in this matter, which has prevented it from allocating in its programme of work the time necessary to give serious and thorough consideration to a programme that concerns the Committee.

9. This question must also be duly transparent insofar as methodology is concerned. My delegation believes that the circulation in our Committee of the documents relating to this topic should be improved, as it would contribute to a better understanding of the question by all delegations.

10. With regard to substantive aspects, we wish to look more closely at a few elements, inter alia, the format of the subprogramme. We firmly support the idea, which was reflected in the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, that disarmament should constitute a separate programme and not a mere subprogramme, as is now being proposed.

11. There is no need to reiterate here the major tasks that we all believe are incumbent on the Organization in this field. Beyond the question of whether or not there is a concurrence of views, this is also reflected in the large number of draft resolutions introduced and adopted every year and which, as we know, has increased somewhat in the past three years.

12. The proposed programme, as indicated in the statement on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, must be a true reflection of the mandates approved by Member States in their decisions, thus embodying the delicate balance represented by the sum total - and not merely some - of our many decisions.

13. The proposed medium-term plan cannot become a vehicle for adopting and implementing ideas and concepts that Member States have neither considered nor approved. Stock phrases may be formulated in some distinguished office and trendy concepts may originate in certain parts of the world but here we are neither in a publishing house nor in an art gallery but rather under the roof of an Organization created for everyone, in which everyone has a voice and a vote. In accordance with the rules of procedure that we have adopted, our decisions alone constitute - and should constitute - the mandate to be implemented.

14. There are objectives and goals that the international community has set for itself long ago. However, despite the fact that so much emphasis has been placed on the end of the cold war, these goals remain unattainable and seem to become more remote with each passing day. The ban on nuclear weapons and their elimination is a clear-cut example of this; nevertheless, the proposed plan does not call for the establishment of a convention prohibiting nuclear weapons and their use.

15. Much remains to be done in order to attain the goal of general and complete disarmament. This Committee's majority decision in favour of nuclear disarmament, the important opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice and the phased programme for the elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework, introduced by the Group of 21 in the Conference on Disarmament, doubtless form a context in which the United Nations must play a vital role in the coming years.

16. With regard to weapons of mass destruction, it will be recalled that, following lengthy and difficult negotiations, our countries agreed on a convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons, which covers everything from their production to their use and even their destruction. Nonetheless, as we know, the Convention has not yet been ratified by the two States with the largest stockpiles, even as it is about to enter into force. This is another area that the proposed medium-term plan should treat more thoroughly.

17. In the light of the foregoing, it is difficult to understand why such inordinate emphasis is being placed on conventional disarmament.

18. Among other questions, there is a reference to the maintenance of the Register of Conventional Arms, including possible regional variants. It would seem that the agreed principle that regional measures must be an initiative of the States of the region in question and taken with their full agreement and participation is no longer valid, and that the Organization, without any resolution on the subject, is now imposing such agreements and regional registers on us.

19. One final example of an area of the proposed medium-term plan that should also be changed is the provision of training and advisory services in the field of disarmament. The annual scholarship programme conducted by the Secretary-General for the benefit of all Member States and, in particular, the developing countries, which has made it possible to increase the number of experts in this field among the States Members of the Organization, seems doomed to be eliminated in the coming years, since it is not even mentioned in the text.

20. In view of the foregoing, my delegation believes that proposed subprogramme 1.3 on disarmament should be redrafted in the light of the views expressed during this discussion, and submitted to the body responsible for its final adoption once the current draft has been amended.

21. These are some of our thoughts on the topic under discussion today. We hope that they will be duly taken into account.

Indonesia*

[Original: English]

[23 October 1996]

1. In the view of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, subprogramme 1.3, Disarmament, should be treated in a separate and distinct programme in the medium-term plan. It is important that the programme reflect the general thrust of numerous resolutions on various disarmament issues adopted by the General Assembly prior to their formulation. It is of equal importance that the viewpoint of an overwhelming majority of the Member States be indicated. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries therefore calls for a reassessment of the approaches contained in the programme and a conscious adjustment of the issues

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* On behalf of the States Members that are members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

involved in order to more accurately reflect the viewpoints and positions of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries which constitute a majority in the Organization.

2. The programme on disarmament should be guided by the basic premise and framework contained in the Final Document adopted by the General Assembly at its first special session devoted to disarmament. There can be no doubt that the principles and priorities contained therein continue to retain their validity and relevance. There exists, as in many agreements and recently reiterated by the unanimous decision by the International Court of Justice, the obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. It follows then that ultimate and complete elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction must be accorded priority. In this context, the programme should also take into account the need for the Conference on Disarmament to establish, on a priority basis, an ad hoc committee to commence negotiations on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament and for the ultimate and complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework.

3. The future agenda for non-proliferation in all its aspects and nuclear disarmament, for the States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has gained new impetus by the adoption of the principles and objectives as contained in the documents adopted by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Despite this recent development and positive changes in international relations over the last few years, nuclear weapons still continue to threaten international security. Nuclear arsenals are constantly being improved for greater accuracy and annihilating capabilities, while new nuclear doctrines are being advanced.

4. The highest priority for the international community, therefore, should remain the ultimate and complete elimination of nuclear weapons as laid down in the Final Document of the first special session devoted to disarmament. The agenda should also include measures on the elimination of the other weapons of mass destruction, in particular chemical and biological weapons, through the full implementation of relevant disarmament treaties.

5. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries stresses the urgency of the need to curb the excessive production, development and build-up of conventional armaments through global and regional approaches agreed freely among the States of the region, taking into account the legitimate requirement of States for self-defence and the specific characteristics of each region. In this connection, it is important that the question of conventional arms control and disarmament be accorded an appropriate place in the programme.

6. New ideas to extend the role of disarmament as a tool of preventive diplomacy and peace-building must be approached with caution and circumspection. This is because such an approach may well divert attention from the implementation of agreements already reached in resolving priority issues. Hence, the task of the United Nations would be to formulate programmes of disarmament that impact on the critical interests of a vast majority of Member States in a balanced manner.

Ireland*

[Original: English]

[17 October 1996]

The European Union recognizes that priority setting for the programmes of the United Nations is very important. In this context, the consideration of agenda item 114 will take place in the Fifth Committee. Accordingly, the delegates from the European Union member States in the First Committee, to ensure an effective response, will act in concert with their respective Fifth Committee colleagues with a view to formulating a European Union position on the various programmes in the Fifth Committee.

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]

The delegation of Mexico fully supports the statement delivered by the delegation of Indonesia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries on this matter. It also supports the statements made by the delegations of Cuba, Brazil and South Africa in this regard.

The delegation of Mexico believes that the content of document A/51/6 (Prog. 1) on subprogramme 1.3, Disarmament, is inadequate. The six paragraphs describing the Organization's future activities for 1998-2001 are insufficient, since they do not reflect the very high priority that Member States accord to disarmament. Moreover, the treatment of nuclear disarmament and conventional disarmament in the subprogramme is not balanced.

The delegation of Mexico is in favour of retaining a separate and autonomous programme on disarmament. The content of the programme must reflect the activities mandated by the Member States, as well as the comments made by various delegations during the current session.

Oman

[Original: English]

Oman associates itself with the position adopted by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries with respect to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. It also would like to emphasize the importance it attaches to the need to have greater attention accorded to nuclear issues.

We believe that document lacks focus when it comes to regional disarmament.

We are of the view that when it comes to the region of the Middle East, the United Nations should include in its programme concrete steps on how to ensure the universality of the non-proliferation regime, which is in our opinion one of

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* On behalf of the States Members that are members of the European Union.

the means towards strengthening peace and security in the region. Moreover, the plan does not contain any measures on how to improve coordination and consultations with other regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council. We believe the United Nations should embark on a continuous dialogue with those organizations to arrive at viable suggestions and recommendations on how to go about achieving regional disarmament.

South Africa

[Original: English]

[21 October 1996]

1. Recent years have seen many accomplishments in the area of disarmament. On the multilateral and global level, this has ranged across:

(a) The conclusion, and now imminent entry into force, of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction;

(b) The indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the adoption by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of the decisions for a strengthened review process and the Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament;

(c) The work which is being done by the States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction to strengthen the Convention by establishing a verifiable compliance regime;

(d) The strengthening of the network of nuclear-weapon-free zones with the recent conclusion of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba) and the Treaty of Bangkok, which have had the effect of extending nuclear-weapon-free zones to cover the entire southern hemisphere. These initiatives are a clear demonstration of the continued commitment of non-nuclear-weapon States to the goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons;

(e) The conclusion and signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The support that this Treaty has is demonstrated by the overwhelming majority by which it was adopted in the General Assembly and by the large number of States signatories that it has attracted;

(f) The recent advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons;

(g) The agreement that was reached on guidelines for international arms transfers at the 1996 session of the Disarmament Commission;

(h) The successful conclusion of the 1996 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions and Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have

Indiscriminate Effects with the adoption of an amended Protocol II on landmines and the addition of the new Protocol IV on blinding laser weapons.

2. There is also much thought being given to the future. While we have seen significant progress in recent years in the area of disarmament, many important and significant tasks remain ahead of us. Here it is worthwhile to mention what has and is being done:

(a) On a future agenda for nuclear disarmament, which for South Africa remains the primary focus in disarmament, by for example the Canberra Commission report and the proposed programme of action for the elimination of nuclear weapons;

(b) The work on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons;

(c) By the Ad Hoc Group established by the States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention;

(d) In terms of General Assembly resolution 50/70 B of 12 December 1995 on small arms by the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms;

(e) To give the necessary international focus to the devastation being created by anti-personnel landmines. Here a major initiative was taken in the recent Declaration of the Ottawa International Strategy Conference: "Towards a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines", held at Ottawa, Canada, from 3 to 5 October 1996, which committed 48 Governments to work together to ensure the earliest possible conclusion of a legally binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines.

3. One of the main objectives of the subprogramme on disarmament is to monitor and assess current and future trends in the field of disarmament and international security to, inter alia, address post-disarmament problems, including the economic and social consequences of disarmament. In this regard the statement by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries accurately reflects the priorities given to weapons of mass destruction, where the main priority continues to be the ultimate and complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

4. My delegation is particularly pleased that the statement by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the subprogramme have accorded conventional disarmament an appropriate priority. As President Nelson Mandela and Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo have recently emphasized, conventional weapons are the cause of most of the death and suffering caused in conflicts around the world today and it is thus important that greater emphasis should be placed on conventional armaments in all disarmament forums and with specific reference to the proliferation of small arms. We agree with the comments by the Secretary-General when he stated in the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace that progress since 1992 in the area of weapons of mass destruction and major weapons systems must be followed by parallel progress in conventional arms, particularly with respect to light weapons (A/50/60-S/1995/1, para. 65).

5. Africa is one of the continents which has suffered the most as a result of the proliferation of light weapons and also the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. These weapons have had a devastating effect on civil

society after conflicts have ended and have placed severe constraints on reconstruction and development, particularly in rural areas. The scale of the problem is well known and the challenge it poses is significant on a continent with limited resources and great developmental needs.

6. In considering the allocation of resources to disarmament, the United Nations should not only take into account the priority which this necessitates and the high emphasis which is given to it by the entire international community, it should focus on the work which is already being done and still needs to be done by the international community on the future agenda for the elimination of all the weapons of mass destruction and to halt the proliferation of conventional weapons beyond the legitimate requirements of self-defence.

United States of America

[Original: English]

[21 October 1996]

1. The United States finds subprogramme 1.3, Disarmament, of the medium-term plan to be a generally good blueprint and mission statement on which the Department of Political Affairs and the Centre for Disarmament Affairs can base their work for the period 1998-2001.

2. The United States wishes to acknowledge the excellent work done by the Secretariat and especially the Centre for Disarmament Affairs in the disarmament area. Their technical and administrative support of the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission, the various review conferences and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, have been commendable.

3. We were pleased to see that the medium-term plan has recognized that much has been accomplished on the nuclear disarmament front. We were also pleased to see that the description of subprogramme 1.3 makes specific reference to the need also to focus on conventional disarmament issues. The United States continues to believe that more progress needs to be made on conventional disarmament matters and that the international disarmament agenda should reflect a better balance between conventional and nuclear issues.

4. We have listened carefully to the statement by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries on subprogramme 1.3 on disarmament. As we understand it, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries is proposing a separate programme for disarmament in the medium-term plan. Without commenting on the questions of substance that the statement raises, we wonder whether the statement might not reflect some confusion as to the purposes of the medium-term plan. As the United States understands it, the medium-term plan is meant to be a programmatic tool - a statement of mission, if you will - to guide the Secretariat's work for the medium term. Financial and budgetary decisions affecting the Secretariat are supposed to be based on this plan. On the other hand, the proposal by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries sounds more like a suggested political agenda for the international community to follow on disarmament issues. As such, the United States believes the proposal by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries may not be relevant to the medium-term plan.

5. On the proposal itself, the United States cannot help but be struck by the great contrast between, on the one hand, the unrestrained emphasis it places on nuclear disarmament and, on the other, the passing, almost secondary reference it makes to the need for conventional disarmament, and even the caution it expresses regarding a possible role for disarmament as a tool of preventive diplomacy and peace-building. This marked contrast appears to reflect a misunderstanding if not an indifference to the real causes of conflict in the post-cold-war era, and in our view, unnecessarily confuses, skews and complicates the goal we all share of making the world a safer place. The contrast, in effect, displays once again a preference (some would say addiction) to the easy rhetoric of nuclear disarmament rather than to the hard work of improving international security.

6. The United States believes that the medium-term plan is a financial planning tool rather than a political statement, and therefore that the First Committee is not the appropriate forum for in-depth discussion of it, nor for the proposals to redraft the programme document prepared by the Secretariat. The Fifth Committee is the proper forum for this, as the General Assembly has recognized by its assignment of the medium-term plan to the Fifth Committee. For this reason, the United States recommends that the report of the Chairman of the First Committee to the Fifth Committee contain a brief summary of the most important elements that have emerged from this debate, along with the written comments submitted to the Chairman, to facilitate the Fifth Committee's consideration of these important questions.